

TWIN FALLS TIMES NEWS

ARTEC finds future in charter school

By Karin Kowalski

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TWIN FALLS -- A coalition of Magic Valley school districts may soon become a charter school.

Leaders of the Advanced Regional Technical Education Coalition want to change its form to help keep programs and funding alive.

Nick Hallett, a retired school superintendent who will be taking over ARTEC, hopes to submit a charter school application next year.

As of October 2004, ARTEC had 1,831 students participating in automotive, culinary arts, finance, health occupations, information technology, agriculture and other programs. The goal is to have students earn industry certifications, said Claire Major, the organization's executive director who will partially retire at the end of the month. "The schools have benefited by working together and that is the bottom line," Major said.

Hallett said about one-fourth of high school graduates finish college. Programs such as ARTEC help connect the remaining three-quarters with training for high-paying jobs.

A charter school would allow the organization to continue some programs and bring in new money. Hallett said the organization would disappear otherwise.

"We need each other to offer the best technical programs," Hallett said.

ARTEC was founded in 1997 and energized with a \$4.8 million grant in 1999 from the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation to help schools buy equipment for technical programs, Major said. Today, those grants aren't as plentiful, while charter schools are growing, Hallett said.

Some of the benefits of charter school status include \$150,000 in state start-up money for the first three years, state vocational dollars, grants and money based on attendance, Hallett said.

The existing ARTEC board could lead the charter school and there would be a limited need for a principal and a business manager, Hallett said. The charter school would contract with other school districts to provide the classes, so it wouldn't need a building.

"We can do together what we can't do separately," Hallett said.

Students in ARTEC could be charter school students for half the day and part of their home districts the rest of the day, Hallett said. He also hopes to get participants from private schools and home-schoolers.

The state only allows six charter schools to start per year, so the earliest ARTEC could start operating as a charter school would be 2006. In the meantime, ARTEC is asking districts to rejoin it for another year. Last year it had 17 members. ARTEC still provides professional development for teachers and support for cooperation between districts. Its Albertson Foundation grant was used up in August, so it hasn't been able to help districts with major purchases, but it will run through carryover, dues and grants.

ARTEC dues are \$500 for high schools under 300 students and \$1,000 for larger high schools.

Twin Falls School District Superintendent Wiley Dobbs said his district has regained its dues through teacher training ARTEC provides. Hallett talked with the Twin Falls School Board about

the charter school plan earlier this month. Dobbs said later that the school board will need more information before it could endorse a charter school.

"I was very intrigued with what Dr. Hallett had to say," Dobbs said.

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